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Senate passes legislation addressing Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health concerns

Contact: Amy Zaagman

1-888-477-8238

LANSING – Legislation addressing concerns surrounding the Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Agency passed the state Senate Thursday, announced state Sens. Beverly S. Hammerstrom, R-Temperance, and Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak.

Senate Bills 591, 1076 and 1079 amend two state statutes converting DWCCMH from a county agency to an independent authority.

"This issue has been a primary concern for Senator Johnson and me for years," said Hammerstrom, chair of the Senate Health Policy Committee. "This legislation is a first step to ensure that citizens in Wayne County receive the kind of services they deserve."

As passed by the Senate, SB 591 would amend the Social Welfare Act to require DWCCMH to become an authority (a separate legal entity) to hold a Medicaid contract with the state. SB 1076 and 1079 make corresponding changes in the Mental Health Code.

Hammerstrom and Johnson have shared a concern about the DWCCMH system since their participation in the state's process to obtain the current federal Medicaid waiver.

"Wayne County is jeopardizing Michigan's federal waiver and Medicaid dollars," said Johnson, chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. "We have been allowed to keep our community-based system because we fought long and hard for the federal Medicaid waiver. We cannot allow political infighting in Wayne County to affect consumers throughout Michigan."

If the federal waiver is lost, the entire state community mental health system would be bid out and consumers could be at the mercy of the lowest bidder looking to make a profit.

Both senators also felt compelled to act amid complaints from consumers and providers who have been frustrated and discouraged by the recent conflicts between the DWCCMH board and the county. Many also have questioned the removal of the agency's interim executive director, and DWCCMH's failure to fulfill their state Medicaid contract. They also cited numerous Mental Health Code violations.

The DWCCMH, which serves about 75,000 people with mental illnesses and disabilities a year, operates on an annual budget of about \$530 million. More than \$500 million is state and federal Medicaid dollars.

SBs 591, 1076 and 1079, now go before the House of Representatives.

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